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CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Written statement* submitted by the Reporters sans frontières international, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 January 2002]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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ENG

China: Stiffening of censorship

As a critical congress of the communist party planned for 2003 is drawing near, the regime of Beijing has started a purge in the media: at least five chief editors were sanctioned and twelve media censored. At the same time, the police was arresting sixteen cyber dissidents. Foreign journalists are still hampered from covering sensitive topics.

On 11 January 2001, Chinese president Jiang Zemin affirms that "information media are the loudspeakers of the Party and the people" and they have a duty "to educate and propagate the spirit of the Central Party's committee". According to him, the department of "publicity" (the former propaganda department) of the Chinese Communist Party is the one to secure observance of that discipline. During the weeks following these declarations, new instructions were addressed to the editors of the main media, to concentrate on the coverage of "positive events". And sanctions are falling without any warning. What is at stake in that purge is two-fold: avoid criticisms as Jiang Zemin's departure from presidency is drawing near, and restructure the press to rule out the too independent provincial media.

Fortunately, this control tightening did not lead to a wave of journalist arrests. Although some of them prove to be bold while testing regularly censorship limits on sensitive topics. More than once, the editorial staff have overridden the Party's instructions by covering accidents such as explosions in a mine or a school without any authorisations. On the other hand, the police concentrated on the control over "subversive activities" on the Internet. No less than sixteen cyber-dissidents were arrested in 2001. On 1st January 2002, at least fourteen journalists are still rotting in prison1989. Four of them have been imprisoned since the crackdown of Beijing in the spring of 1989,.

In 2001, the wave battle continued between the Chinese government and international radios broadcasting in Mandarin, Tibetan or Uighur. Despite frequent jamming, programs in Ouighour through *Voice of America* (VOA), *Radio Free Asia* (RFA) and *Radio Almaty* (based in Kazakhstan) are much listened to by the population of Xinjiang. In October, *RFA* passed from one to two broadcasting hours per day. Programmes in Tibetan broadcast by *Voice of Tibet*, *VOA*, *BBC* and *RFA* became the target of the authorities who spread out huge means to make them inaudible. Foreign radios are still a real "breath of fresh air" for Uighur and Tibetans. The auditors are conscious of the risks they are taking and most of the time, they chose to listen to them secretly. "We never have news about Xinjiang on television nor on the national radio. Just songs, dances and political propaganda. We are bombarded with governmental political opinions. It is useful to listen to diverging opinions on free radios", attests an Uighur. On the other hand, in March, the official agency *Xinhua* asserts that " infiltration by hostile foreign radios is becoming more and more dangerous".

In Tibet, instructions are strictly applied. Thus, in November 2001, the propaganda official of the province reminds that "at all administrative levels, the Party's newspapers must be read and studied". In Inner Mongolia, control is also very strict. Thus, the authorities are still banning the publication of dissident magazine *The Voice of Southern Mongolia* banned in 1995.

In 2001, the Chinese government has displayed again its determination to prevent the foreign press from covering sensitive topics. Thus, the Chinese communist Party denies foreign correspondents of the right to investigate freely on dissidence, illegal religious movements corruption, AIDS in the province of Henan, natural disasters, Tibetan and Uighur separatists. According to the rules imposed by the regime of Beijing, foreign journalists must ask ahead of time for an authorisation to leave the capital to the ministry of Foreign Affairs. Once in a

province, They are placed under the control, often very strict, of the local representatives of the ministry.

Impunity in the case of a murdered journalist

On January 15th 2001, Feng Zhaoxia, journalist for the daily *Gejie Daobao*, published in the town of Xi'an (province of the Shanxi), is found dead, his throat deeply slit. One week after the body was discovered, the police decided on a suicide despite assertions to the contrary by the family, his colleagues and local associations of journalists. According to them, it is a murder connected to some articles the journalist had published. According to Guangzhou daily, *Yangcheng Wanbao*, and Hong Kong newspaper, *Ming Pao*, Feng Zhaoxia had investigated into the activities of a local Mafia-like group and had denounced complicities between these groups and some authorities. According to his wife, Feng Zhaoxia, 48 years old and father of two children, had no reason to commit suicide. On the eve of his disappearance, the journalist had received a phone call. He left his home and never came back. Moreover, the corpse had deep gashes at the throat and it was very unlikely that the victim might have slashed himself that way. The journalist 's family and colleagues, indignant at the police hasty conclusions, have been asking several times that the dossier be re-opened and that a serious investigation be carried out. Moreover, a few days after the crime, the public department of information of the province prohibited that new articles be published about the death of the journalist.

Fourteen journalists jailed in China

Yu Dongyue, Hu Liping, Chen Yanbin, Zhang Yafei, Liu Jingsheng, Ma Tao, Wu Shishen, Tenpa Kelsang, Wang Yiliang, Qi Yanchen, Ngawang Choephel and Lu Wanbin.

Two journalists imprisoned for having investigated on corruption among communist Party's officials

Gao Qinrong, journalist for *Xinhua* agency in the province of Shanxi, was arrested on 4th December 1998 and sentenced to thirteen-year imprisonment for "corruption", "embezzlement and "immoral earning", thanks to perjuries. Actually, the local authorities blame him for having revealed the failure of a great irrigation project to be imputed to the provincial official of the communist Party. According to the testimony of Gao Qinrong's wife, Duan Maoying, in November 2001, the journalist imprisoned "has grown really weak. He lost his hair. He cannot write anymore because his hand shake too much". Duan is only authorised to visit him once a month. On 9th September 2001, Gao Qinrong had a letter sent to Mary Robinson, High commissioner for human rights at the United Nations in which he asks her to approach the Chinese authorities in his favour. Despite this initiative, Gao affirms that the authorities did not pay attention to his case and that Huang Youquan, High official for the Party in the Shanxi, is protected by some members of the central Committee in Beijing, Hu Fuguo in particular, former Party official of Shanxi. On 8 December 2001, it is Duan Maoying's turn to address president Jiang Zemin and the Prime minister, on the occasion the journalists' day (official celebration for the profession). The journalist's wife asserts that the supreme Court, the central discipline commission of the Party, local and national press representatives, refuse to support Gao's case. Only a few courageous Chinese journalists, from weekly *Nanfang Zhoumo* in particular, have published articles on the journalist imprisoned, but they have been fired since then. "everybody is frightened for there is a lot of pressure from above", concludes Duan who came to Beijing to defend the case of her husband. She asserts she has spent one hundred thousand yuans (more than ten thousand euros) to lead this campaign for the liberation of her husband.

On September 5, Jiang Weiping, officer of daily *Wen Wei Po's* offices (published in Hong Kong) in Dalian (province of Liaoning), is judged most secretly by Dalian intermediary Court. His relatives are not authorised to attend the audience nor to visit him at the town prison. The

sentence will only be brought in at the beginning of November: Jiang Weiping is sentenced to nine year-imprisonment for "disclosure of State secrets", "attempt to overthrow State power" and " illegal detention of confidential documents". He was arrested on 5 December 2000 and is held in the prison of Dalian, in the province of Liaoning. The justice blames the journalist for having published a series of four articles in Hong Kong magazine *Qianshao*, on the corruption of high officials of Northern China. These articles were particularly implicating the governor of the province of Liaoning, Bo Xilai, son of the Chinese communist Party veteran Bo Yibo. Ma Xiangdong, former vice mayor of Shenyang, sentenced to death for corruption, was also targeted by Jiang's investigations. According to the journalist, Ma had embezzled more than three millions euros to gamble in the casinos of Macao. At last, Jiang affirmed in one of his articles that Qian Duhua, mayor of Daqing (province of Heilongjian), was using public funds to purchase apartments for his 29 mistresses.